



A Pilgrimage to The Shrine of Our Lady of Loreto.

BY GEORGE FALKNER.

WITH
Illustrations from Engravings and Photographs.

Published by

ELLIOT STOCK, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C.

J. E. CORNISH, ST. ANN'S SQUARE, MANCHESTER.

*Preparing for publication, in large Crown 4to, with
Eight full-page Illustrations and Characteristic
Typographical Ornamentation,*

A Pilgrimage to the Shrine of our Lady of Loreto.

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BY GEORGE FALKNER.  
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ONE of the most interesting of the numerous Shrines in Italy is that of "Our Lady of Loreto," not only on account of its great antiquity and legendary history, but of the vast treasures which are preserved within its walls. Situated on the summit of a mountain, near Ancona, on the Adriatic, it lies so far outside the route of ordinary tourists as to be seldom visited except by the Student of Mediæval Art, or the believer in its Supernatural Origin.

THE sanctity and veneration in which Loreto is held are due to the accepted belief that it possesses the actual House in which the Virgin Mary dwelt at Nazareth, and that by divine intervention it was transported by Angels from Syria to the shores of the Adriatic. In the course of many centuries unbounded wealth has been expended upon

its safety and adornment, and the Church now presents, as it did during the Pontificate of Leo X, some of the most marvellous examples of the work of Sansovino and other masters which can be found in Italy.

The story of the Author's recent Pilgrimage to this remarkable place is told in a simple, appreciative, and impartial spirit, and the text is amply Illustrated by Lithographs reproduced from Photographs and Ancient Engravings obtained at Loreto. Beyond a description of the Shrine as it now is, the Book traces its history from the earliest ages, and notices in detail most of the objects of Mediæval Art which its Treasure House contains.

Each page is enclosed in rich Antique Bordures of Florescent and Grotesque design, adapted from the rare and valuable "Book of the Hours," printed in Germany in 1526; and as the Author is the head of the well-known firm of "GEORGE FALKNER & SONS, Art Printers, Manchester," the Book may justifiably be regarded as a specimen of unique and elegant typography.

Only 400 Copies of the Work have been printed, the Price of which, to *Subscribers only*, will be Seven Shillings and Sixpence.

After the closing of the Subscription List the Price will be advanced to Ten Shillings and Sixpence.

A Form of Order accompanies this Prospectus.

ELLIOT STOCK,

PUBLISHER,

62, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C.

FORM OF ORDER.

TO MR. ELLIOT STOCK,

62, PATERNOSTER ROW,

LONDON, E.C.



PLEASE to enter my name as a Subscriber to the

Book entitled

"A Pilgrimage to the Shrine of
Our Lady of Loreto,"

by GEORGE FALKNER, as described in the foregoing Prospectus.

Name

Address

Date

1882.

Mr. ELLIOT STOCK,

62, Paternoster Row,

LONDON, E.C.

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Our Lady of Loreto.**

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J. E. CORNISH, St. Ann's Square, Manchester.

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GEORGE FALKNER & SONS, ART PRINTERS, MANCHESTER.

To

CHARLES HILDITCH RICKARDS, Esq., J.P.

of Manchester,

In token of a sincere and long-continued Friendship.

August 1882.



Preface.



HERE is much at Loreto to induce the Tourist in Italy to turn aside from beaten tracks, and spend a couple of days on the mountain. He can reach it from many points—from Florence, through Perugia, by railway, or by steamer from Venice. In either case, he had better make Ancona his head-quarters, for although there is a railway thence to Recanati, and an omnibus from the Station to Loreto, the times of departure and arrival are not always convenient; and it is better, in every respect, to take a carriage from Ancona.

On returning from my last visit to Italy, I found those friends to whom I related what I had seen at Loreto so much interested and surprised that I was induced to prepare a brief narrative of my experience and impressions for insertion in the columns of a local

PREFACE.

newspaper. Afterwards I resolved to expand that contribution very considerably, and to add to it the result of some historical enquiries, the materials of which fortunately fell in my way, as explained.

Having the Printing Press at my right hand, and the resources of Lithography at command, I have been enabled to add to my *brochure* some features which may enhance its acceptance, by reproducing, from Photographs and old Engravings obtained at Loreto, a view of the little village on the mountain top, and representations of the principal objects of interest connected with the Church.

The bordures which enclose the pages are adaptations of the series which decorates an edition of the rare and celebrated "Book of the Hours" in my possession,—designed and printed in 1526 by Thielman Kerver, and which I regard as an interesting revival of the style of Ecclesiastical Printing which prevailed before the Reformation.

GEORGE FALKNER.

MANCHESTER, *August 1882.*





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A Pilgrimage to the Shrine of our Lady of Loreto.

I.



FTEN as I had visited Italy, wandering north and south, east and west, and ending on one occasion by sailing round the whole Peninsula from Venice to Genoa, it had never come about that a visit to Loreto lay in my way. Who has not heard of the Shrine of the Virgin at Loreto—its wealth and wonders—its mysteries and miracles—its world-wide attraction for the faithful and the feeble of all Christendom? Once, being at Ancona, within a day's journey of the sacred mountain, our steamer's call was so brief that my long-cherished wish to see



Loreto had to be abandoned, and I resolved that if I ever re-visited Italy I should sacrifice both time and trouble to gratify my curiosity.

At length, having recently taken the road again, and sojourned once more in Florence, straying to Siena, Perugia, and Assisi, the opportunity arose of paying a pilgrimage to the Holy Shrine. It was towards the end of April, when, in this part of mid-Italy, the foliage is out in the fullest luxuriance, the vine extended from tree to tree, the orange and the citron in fruit or bloom, with a glorious sun above, and the bluest of blue skies around.

A journey by railway of about eight hours, through Foligno, where you meet the train on its way to Rome, brings you to the town of Ancona, on the Adriatic Sea. The charmingly varied scenery through which the line passes, awakens admiration, wonder, and awe. Wide-spreading valleys of surprising fertility, "needing but to be tickled by the hoe to laugh with the harvest," sweep up to the base of the lofty mountain ranges; then the road seems to penetrate into the very heart of the mountains themselves, from whence one could scarcely imagine an outlet, till it is observed that the way lies along the side of some raging torrent, leading onwards by tortuous windings, and overshadowed by impending rocks, which seem to have cast their boulders down, or reared their defiant heads in resentment at man's intrusion. Then some sudden

turn changes the scene, and brings you again into smiling valleys and by quiet villages, where the stream has settled into peaceful repose, and deigns to lend a helping hand to man's necessities—turning the “dizzy mill-wheel round,” or sporting through meadows mottled by the outspread linen of industrious housewives.

Here and there, along the way, one comes upon charming groups of the peasants busy at work in the fields, shoulder deep in the meadow-grass starred with scarlet tulips,—the snow-white tunics and broad-brimmed straw hats of the men contrasting with the gay costumes of the women, with their brilliantly coloured handkerchiefs twisted over their dark hair. All these combine to form many a glorious picture, which an artist might well envy the opportunity of transferring to his canvas. At length, sweeping through lovely Fabriano, the line approaches Falconara, where the first glimpse of the blue Adriatic is disclosed, and you are gently led along the sea-board into Ancona.

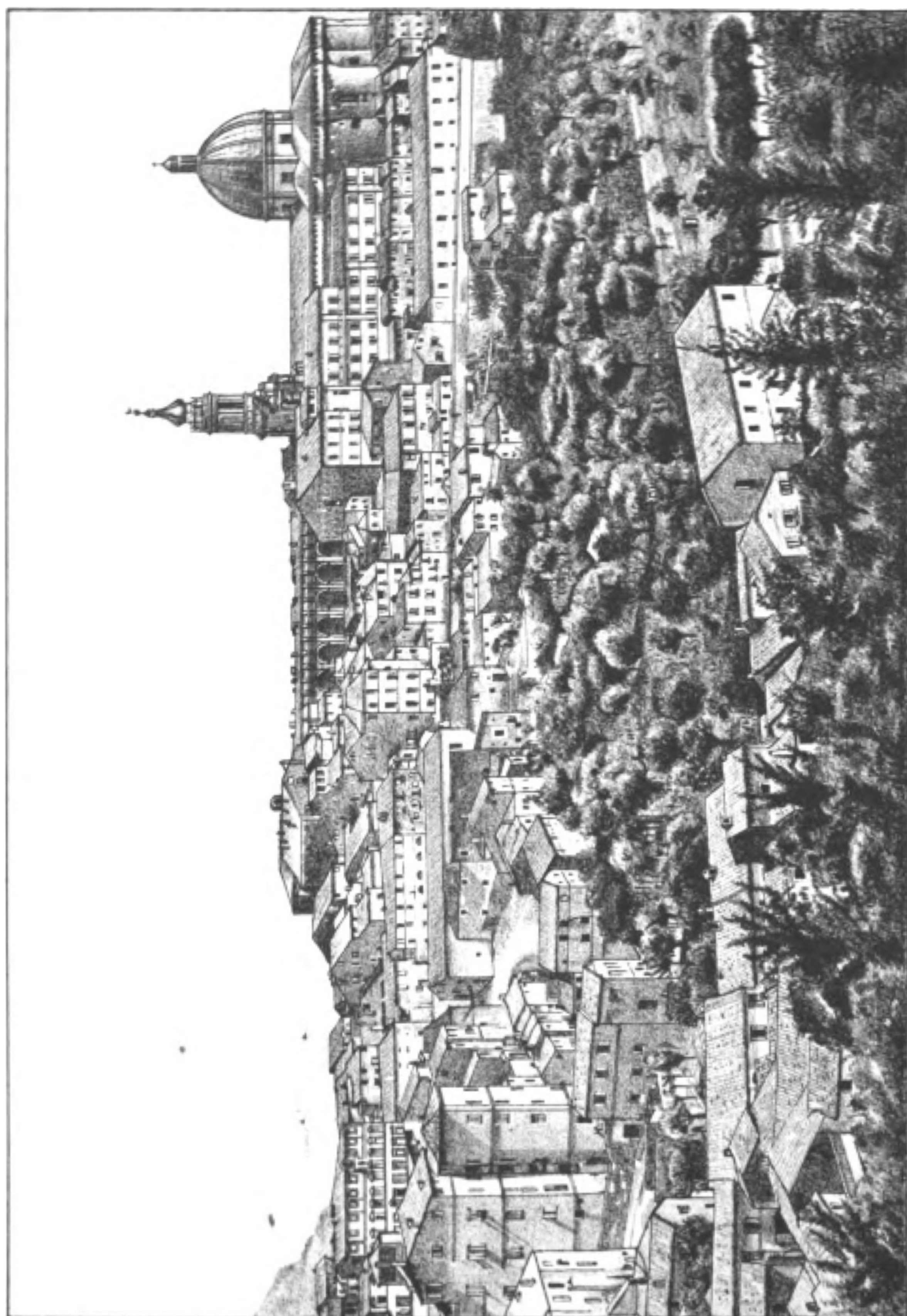
Ancona, as is well known, derives its name from its similarity in shape to an elbow, and is the chief port on the Adriatic. It has many classic memories, for it was founded by the Doric Greeks, and subsequently became a Roman colony. To the Emperor Trajan it was indebted for its fine quay and wharves, and a triumphal arch of marble, erected in his honour by the Senate of Rome A.D. 115, remains to the present day, and is held to be one of the finest



examples of ancient dedicatory architecture. The town rises by steep gradients, from its wide base on the sea, to the summit of the hill, the streets being narrow and tortuous, but, like most Italian cities, it presents a more picturesque appearance at a distance than upon a near approach.

The carriage-road from Ancona to Loreto leads by a circuitous route round the foot of the hill upon which the former is built, and follows the valley as far as Recanati, from which point it reaches an elevation commanding a view of the distant Adriatic ; then, after descending by a steep incline, it rises to its final height about a mile from the little village of Loreto. All the way upwards a never-ending succession of ragged begging urchins, whose importunity is not easily repressed, besieges your carriage. The little dwellings on the road-side are of the frailest and meanest construction, and poverty and laziness assert themselves at every turn. At length you meet a lofty cross, marking the spot from which the pilgrims, during the festal days of the Virgin, approach the Shrine upon their knees, praying, and casting their beads as they creep along for nearly half a mile. How many a weary soul, during the bye-gone centuries, must have climbed these dusty roads, laden with untold sorrows, and hopeful of consolation from the holy Shrine ! From what far-distant lands must they not have begged their way, with all their belongings on their backs, finding shelter under hedge-rows, and a pittance from door to door ! One can easily





"LORETO."

imagine, too, the long processional lines of Popes and Cardinals, with their attendants, reaching at length this sacred token of approach to the "Holy House," and straining their gaze to catch the first glimpse of its towers.

Within the walls of the town there is quite an air of commercial activity, for the narrow street leading to the church is lined on both sides with little booths, on the outer counters of which are set out for sale endless varieties of rosaries, crucifixes, rings, medals, photographs, and pictures of the Virgin, as well as other objects held sacred from their association with Loreto. The sanctity of these wares, however, does not seem to render their vendors (who are mostly women) indifferent to their worldly interests, for in their clamorous struggles to secure customers a perfect Babel of tongues arises, from which the visitor is thankful to make his escape by seeking shelter in the adjoining inn.

Here he may find himself introduced into novel and motley society, and may take his place in the large upper room laid out for refreshments, the various tables in which are crowded with soldiers in gay uniforms, tonsured priests in their long black garments, travel-stained monks in the brown garb of the Franciscans, and nuns, whose comely faces peep out under snowy hoods and spotless kerchiefs. Sacred though their offices be, there is no lack of joviality amongst this odd company, for jokes are bandied from

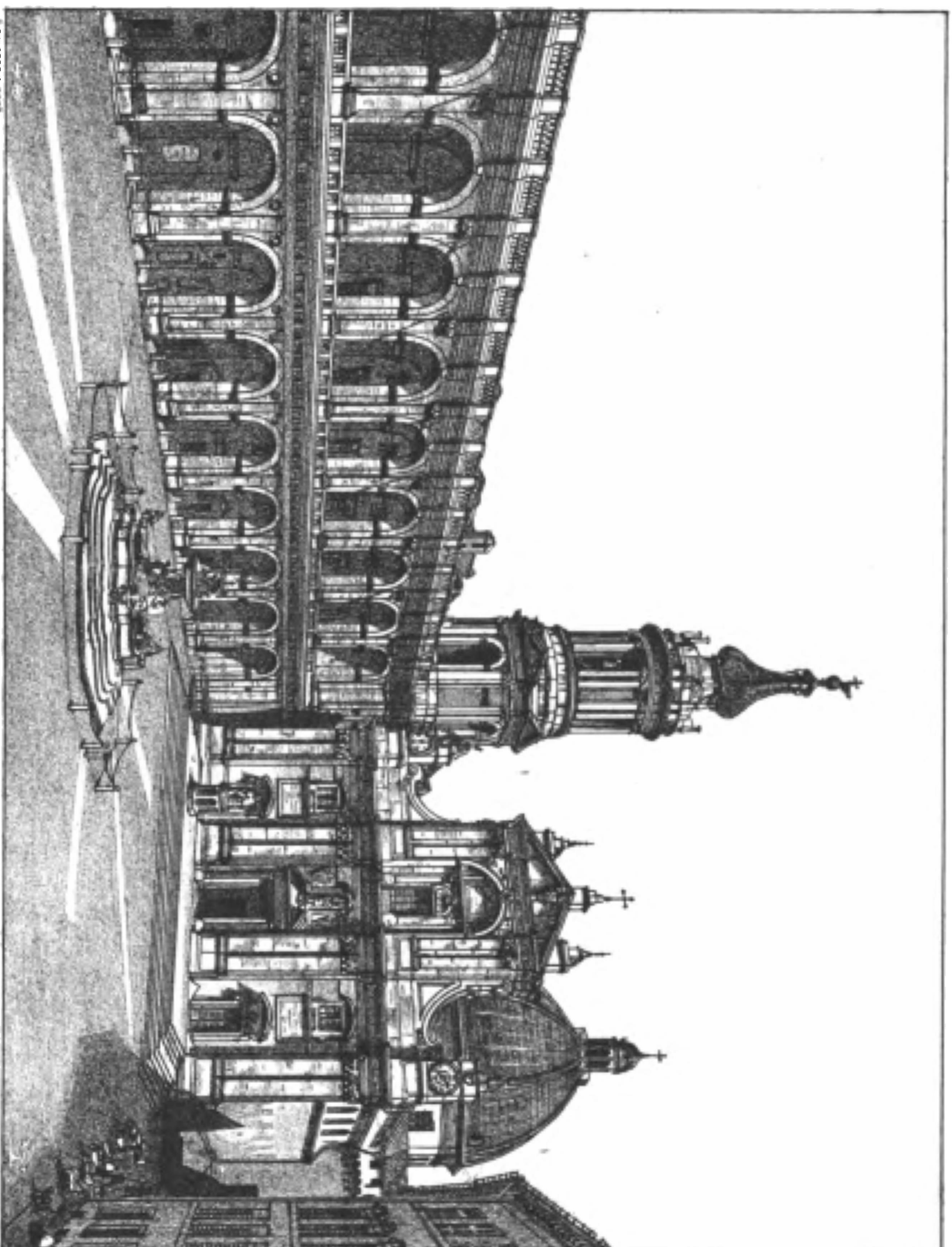


table to table, awakening a chorus of laughter, and the good things of this life seem to be relished by all alike, as the viands disappear and the glasses are replenished.

A continuation of the street leads to a spacious paved quadrangle, at one end of which stands the great Church containing the sacred house, flanked by the palace of the archbishop and the sumptuary quarters of the ecclesiastics. In elegance and richness these contrast strangely with the humble village of which they are the crown. Two magnificent fountains divide the square, and in front of the church stands a fine seated statue, in bronze, of Pope Sixtus the Fifth, once a shepherd boy in the marshes of Ancona, but who lived to rule with a vigour and wisdom that were felt in Italy and throughout all Europe.

The church itself is of noble proportions, built of marble, in the Romanesque style, and surmounted with a cupola of vast circumference. Adjoining, but apart from it, as in most Italian churches, rises the campanile, or bell-tower, four stories in height, octagonal in form, and terminating in a golden cross. A church of such dimensions as this seems far beyond the requirements of a population numbering about 6,000 persons; and the whole piazza, with its grand basilica, and the massive arcaded buildings which form the Archbishop's Palace, appears more fitly designed for a centre in some large city than for a village perched on the summit of a mountain.





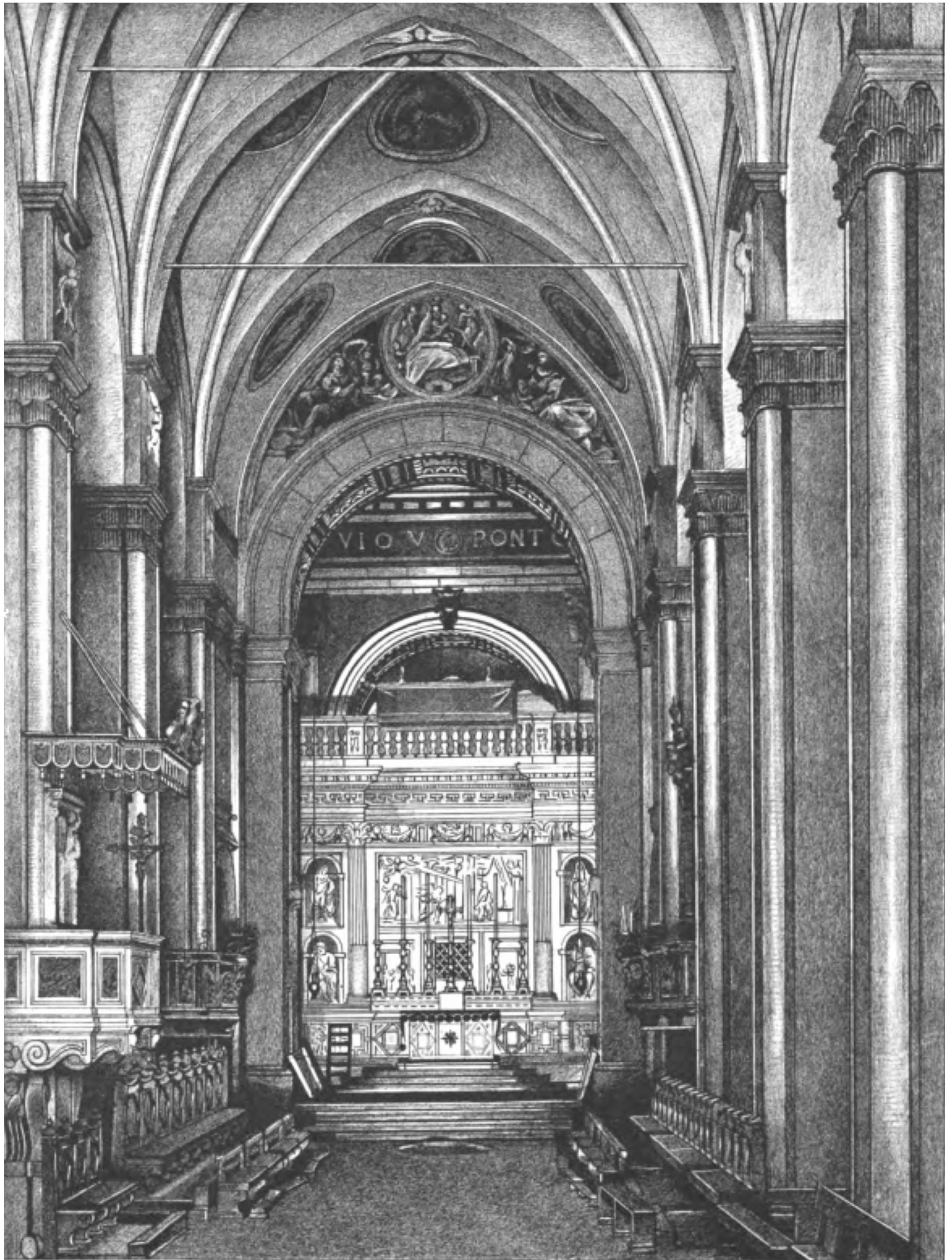
· THE · ARCHBISHOP'S · PALACE ·

Upon entering the church I was much surprised to find the interior so utterly different from that which I had imagined it to be. Coming recently from Assissi, my mind was occupied with the remembrance of the little rugged retreat of St. Francis, which is still preserved in all its simplicity, under the dome of Sta. Maria degli Angeli, and naturally I anticipated a similar scene at Loreto. Instead of this, however, I found myself confronted with a magnificent example of architecture, of the purest marble, which shone with dazzling whiteness, rising from the pavement beneath the dome like some independent fane of surpassing loveliness. Its form is nearly that of a square, and the profusion of carved work and sculptured statuary which its sides present cast into shadow all the surrounding adornments of the interior.

Upon nearer examination this marvellous encasement reveals such a wealth of artistic beauty that one may profitably pass many an hour in its contemplation. Here we have the work of one of the most celebrated architects of the Renaissance period—Bramante—of whom it is said "that he was the first to divine and bring to light the genius of Raphael." Resplendent in purity of material, elaborate in ornamentation, and uniting the utmost grace with the highest perfection of execution, I can conceive of no single example of mediæval art worthy to be placed in comparison with this. And it would seem, as if rising to the dignity and grandeur of Bramante's design, Sansovino, the sculptor, had consecrated all his genius to its



decoration, for neither at Venice nor at Rome had I seen any example of that master's work which could fitly vie with that before which I stood. Here then was a realization of the thought and imagination of two of the greatest men that Italy had produced,—a structure which was built during the reigns of no less than four Popes, receiving its inspiration from Leo X. and its completion in the time of Gregory XIII. Let me record the opinion of the learned Vasari (himself a pupil of Michael Angelo), in commenting upon the works of Sansovino at Loreto:—"In the "largest space of this façade," he says, "Sansovino placed the "Archangel, Gabriel, at the moment of the Annunciation, which was "made in the very chamber which this encasement encloses. He "puts into this work such a grace that nothing more perfect could "be conceived. The Virgin is entirely absorbed in listening to the "salutation of the kneeling angel, which looks not like a figure "chiselled in marble, but as a veritable celestial being, and the 'Ave "Maria' seems almost to float from its lips. Two angels accompany "Gabriel; one appears as if walking by his side, the other is in the "act of flying; two other angels in the further distance are so "exquisitely carved that one may imagine them to be alive. "Beneath a cloud, and as it were detached, are cherubims "sustaining God the Father, who sends his Spirit by a ray of light, "emanating from himself alone, in a perfectly natural manner, as is "likewise the treatment of the Dove, which typifies the Holy



•THE INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH•

"Spirit. It is impossible" he continues, "to describe with what
 "grace and refined finish Sansovino has portrayed a vase of flowers
 "placed in the chamber of the Virgin. The wings of the angels,
 "their flowing locks, the beauty of their countenances, and their
 "elastic draperies combine to make this ravishing piece of sculpture
 "a perfect *chef d'œuvre*; and this holy place, the veritable dwelling
 "of the Mother of the Son of God, could not receive a decoration
 "more rich, more beautiful, or more noble than this which is given
 "to it by the architecture of Bramante and the chisel of Sansovino,
 "for if it were entirely covered with the most rare and precious
 "stones, these would be worth nothing beside the examples of these
 "two masters." Impassioned though this praise may be, I felt that
 no one who is capable of being impressed by whatever is chaste and
 beautiful can, as he contemplates this wonderful work of art, lay
 upon Vasari the charge of exaggeration. The work of Sansovino
 upon this façade is flanked by two smaller sculptures, by some con-
 temporary artist, representing the Visitation and the Taxing at
 Bethlehem of the Virgin and Child.

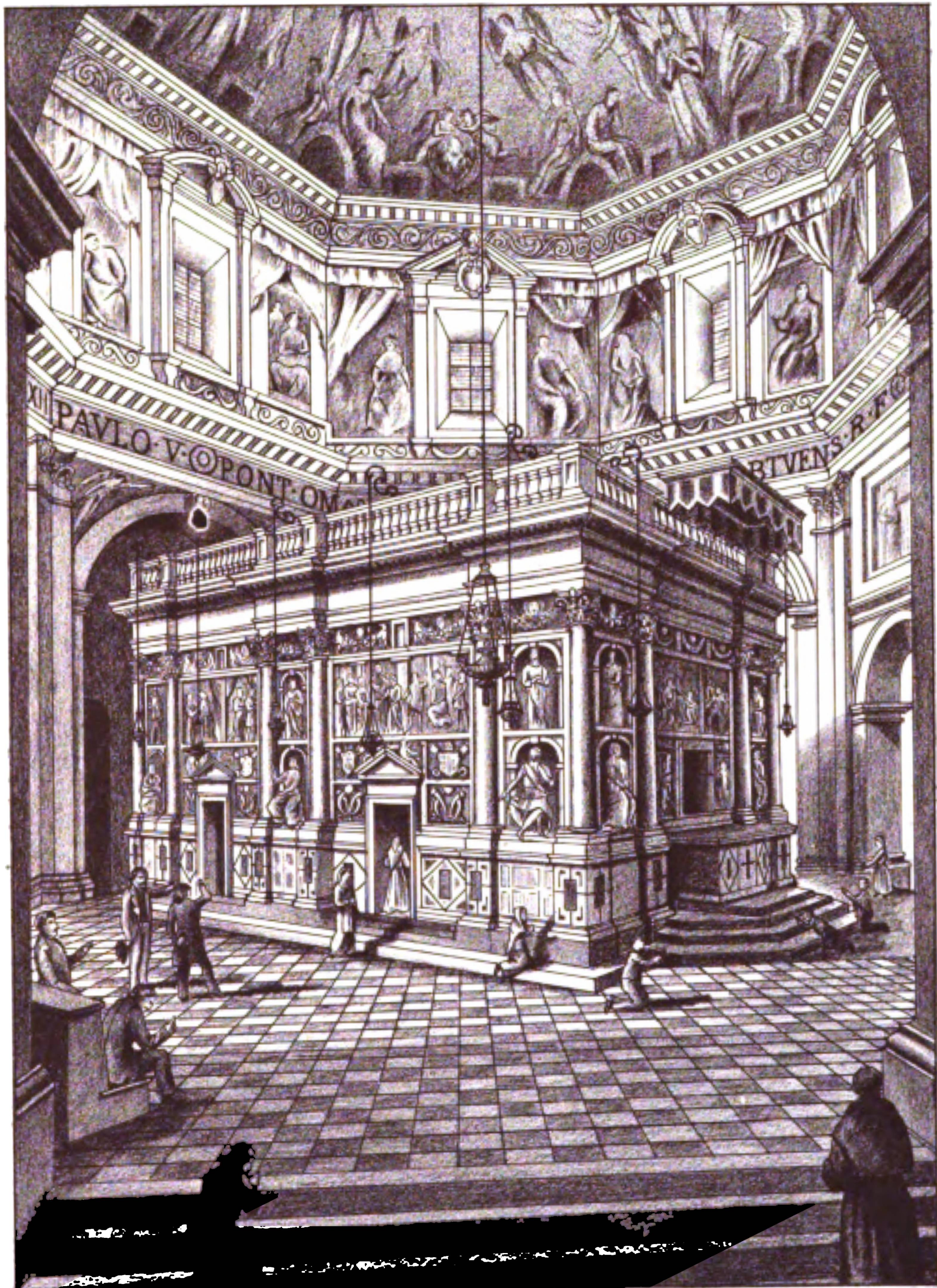
Upon the southern side of the encasement there is another
 special work of Sansovino, in which is rendered the "Holy Cradle."
 Of this Vasari thus speaks: "Sansovino began on the lateral
 "façade the Nativity of our Saviour, the shepherds, and the choir of
 "angels who sang; he completed them so successfully that they



"appear to be living beings." Upon this side also are sculptured the armorial bearings of the Medici family, from whom Leo X. sprang, no doubt in commemoration of the princely aid which that Pope rendered to the safety and adornment of the Shrine within. These are not unlike the badge of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, consisting, as they do, of three feathers, bound by a ribbon, upon which is inscribed the solitary word "Semper."

The eastern façade is remarkable for a long inscription, in Latin, engraved upon the low pediment which surrounds the encasement, and which, it appears, was indited by Clement VIII., the haughty Pontiff who supported the Catholic League in France against Henri IV. It gives a succinct history of the "Holy House," and of its translation, so that pilgrims may know how and from whence came the Shrine which they visit. Above this, and in the centre of the façade, is sculptured upon a large panel a representation of the principal events recorded upon the pediment, especially the passage of the "Holy House" across the Adriatic upon the wings of angels. Particularly noticeable are the figures of two peasants, who seem to be utterly beside themselves at the sight of the little dwelling flying in the air; one of these, by a movement of his lips, characteristically rustic, stops his mule in order that he may contemplate more leisurely so marvellous a sight. Vasari attributes this work to Nicolas Tribolo. Although





EXTERIOR OF THE HOLY HOUSE.

inferior to the master-pieces of Sansovino, the incident is portrayed with much gracefulness of arrangement, and from its affording scope for the play of imagination, I felt it to be strikingly attractive and impressive. Appealing, as it does, to the eye of sense, it is well adapted to awaken belief in the reality of the event, especially in the minds of a people never permitted to doubt, but always instructed to believe in everything recognized by the Church, however fanciful or improbable.

Upon the north side, the Nativity of the Virgin occupies the central position—this work was begun by Sansovino, and continued and finished by two succeeding Masters. Its design is emblematical, and by a variety of figures is intended to illustrate the seven virtues of the Virgin,—innocence, fidelity, charity, humility, obedience, modesty, and love of retirement.

Enhancing these panels, life-sized figures of Prophets and Sybils stand erect in double niches at the angles, and the building is surmounted by a rich balustraded coping, which gives elegance and completeness to the whole. The elaborate festoons which surround the House, below the architrave, are said by Vasari to be the work of Simon Mosca, and the different allegorical sculptures of the frieze are all mentioned by Vasari.

Looking round the Church, it is seen that the dome which rises above the House rests upon a series of arches, carrying deeply-



recessed lantern windows, which give light below. From the cornice above these springs the cupola. Upon the spaces between the arches are frescoes representing the four Evangelists, and cherubims, whilst between the windows the four cardinal Virtues are depicted. The vaulted roof itself displays eight figures, representing the doctors of the Temple, standing, and a series of cherubims, who sustain the armorial bearings of the different Popes and Cardinals who have enriched the Church. A choir of angels, soaring in the clouds, each bearing a musical instrument, completes the design ; but time and weather have sadly dimmed the splendour of their colours.

The internal construction of the Church—differing from most sacred edifices—indicates the necessity which was felt for its defence in an age when danger from without was to be apprehended. In some respects it may be regarded as an impregnable castle, for not only are its outer walls crenelated, but within there is a covered corridor which admits of troops making the tour of the interior ; indeed, when viewed at a distance, the basilica presents some resemblance to a fortress erected upon the side of a hill. There are numerous smaller and larger chapels, each of which contains a reproduction, in mosaic, of the work of some great master, amongst which may be noted those of Anibale Caracci, Fra Bartolomeo, Domenichino, Guido Reni, and, strangely, of one by the celebrated





• BAPTISMAL FONT AT LORETO •

Angelica Kauffmann, who, as is well-known, was the only lady who attained the distinction of having been elected a member of our Royal Academy of Arts.

In the Baptistry there is a superb work of art in bronze, designed for a font, in the shape of a large pyramidal vase, with a noble cover, the whole being sustained by four cherubims. The different instances of purification by washing mentioned in Holy Scripture are wrought out upon its sides with a refinement of detail unsurpassable, and the apex of the design bears two exquisite statuettes, representing the baptism of our Saviour by St. John.

Returning through the Church to the "Holy House," I find admittance into the interior by a narrow door, which is guarded by one holding in his hand a drawn sword, ready with his life to protect from sacrilegious outrage the hallowed treasures within. You find the little chamber lighted by sixty-four lamps hung from the vault, and when the eye adapts itself to the subdued light, you discover within the shrine the image of the Virgin and Child, carved, it is said, out of the cedar of Lebanon, black as jet with age, and raised upon a golden altar inlaid with jewels.

The first impression awakened is that of surprise at the unexpected smallness of the dwelling when contrasted with the



area of its encasement, and its bare unplastered walls furnish a strange commentary upon the lavish grandeur of its exterior. Examining the material used in the construction of the house, it seems to have been built of tufa, cut in the shape of bricks, which preserve the ancient square form, and are indisputably of great age. The ceiling does not exist, for you are able to look up into the Church, and the altar in front serves to make a division between itself and an interior altar, constructed of stone, which is held to have accompanied the house in its various flights. The tessellated floor is utterly out of keeping with the general character of the interior, and would justifiably challenge enquiry on the threshold, were it not written that "its floor was left at Nazareth." There is but one small window, pierced in the wall to the south, having a bronzed grating, and above which hangs the ancient cross of the "Holy House." A legendary history is associated with the interior altar, from it being said to have been consecrated by St. Peter, and in this belief Cosmo II., the Grand Duke of Tuscany, caused it to be ornamented with agates, lapis lazuli, and Sicilian jaspers. But the most interesting object within the house is the Statue of the Madonna and Child, which is ablaze with light. Its white embroidered robe, striped with gold and silver, is set in bands with a wealth of jewels that dazzles the eye, and upon its forehead rests a golden crown, covered with brilliants, emeralds, and pearls. A smaller but similar crown encircles the head of the child, as well as a magnificent





• INTERIOR • OF • THE • HOLY • HOUSE •

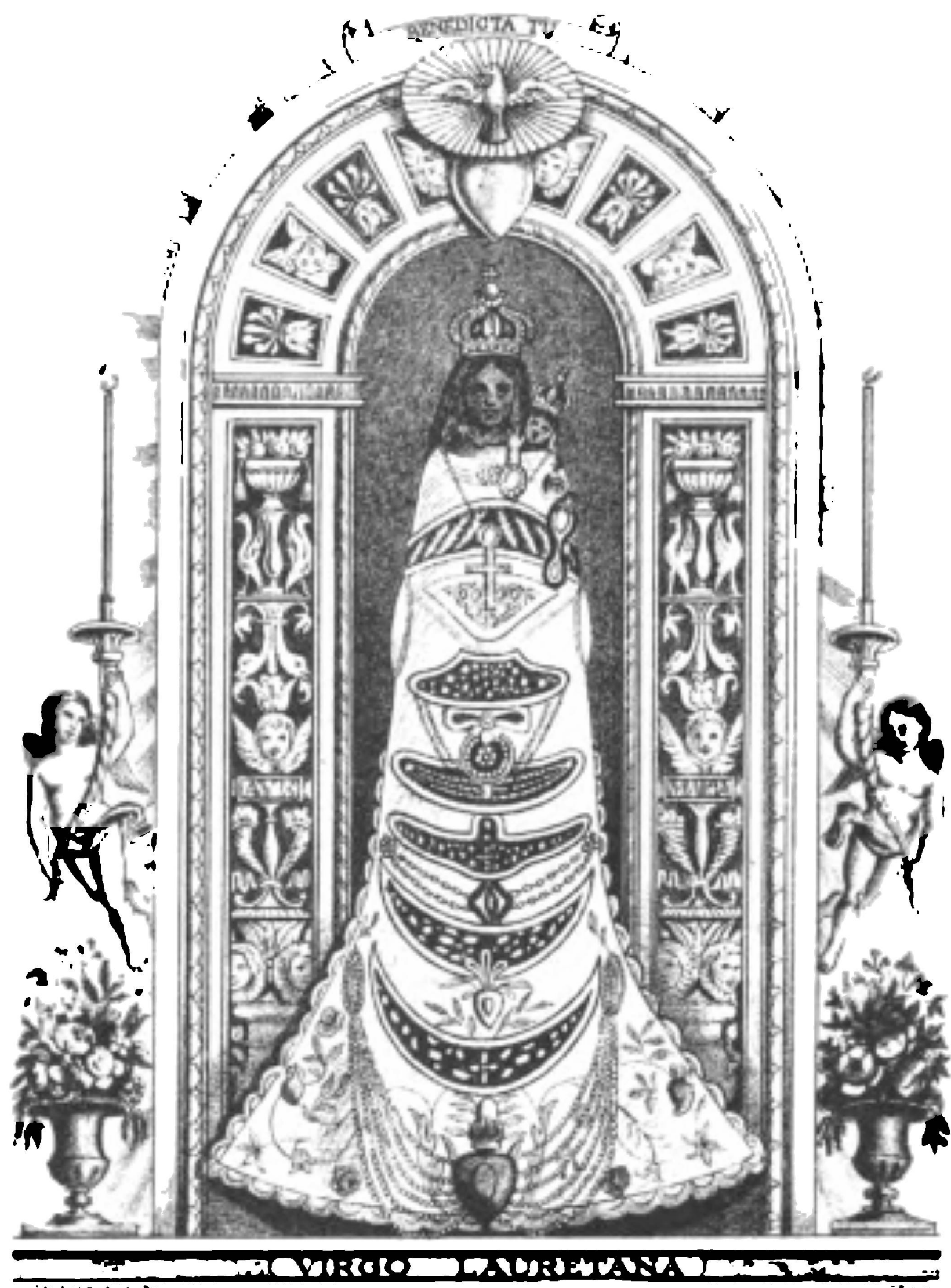
collar, mounted on crimson velvet, from which shine out brilliants, topazes, pearls, and emeralds, mounted in the purest gold.

Whilst gazing, however, upon all this lavish display of wealth and ornament, one cannot help feeling that it is in utter dissonance with the crude, unartistic, and lifeless figures which it encumbers, and is disposed to wonder at the superstitious reverence of Pope Pius VII, to whom the shrine is indebted, not only for the return of the Statue to Loreto after it was taken by the French in 1797, but for the priceless decorations which it now bears.

Amongst other relics to be seen in the "Holy House," is an ancient coffer under the altar, into which I was invited, no doubt "for a consideration," to have deposited any article I might desire to have consecrated. I did not enquire how long it was necessary for the object to remain in the coffer, but having no anxiety in that direction, and no faith in charms or other tokens of special virtue, I gratefully declined. I was interested, however, to learn that I could see an authentic copy of a letter written by a certain Bishop of Coimbra, who was forced to return a stone of the "Holy House" which had been accorded to him by a Papal mandate of Paul III. The stone is replaced in the south wall, and is marked by a bar of iron to this day. The poor Bishop, it seems, declares in his letter that he had never been happy, and had enjoyed no rest, since he

had received the stone, and that, having fallen seriously ill, it occurred to him that he ought at once to return the holy relic, and, having done so, of course he was immediately restored.

This recalled to my memory an incident which occurred to myself many years ago when, on a visit to Milan, I had for my guide a young Italian native who had served some years in the English Navy, and who thereby had picked up as much of our tongue as emboldened him to set up as a ciceroné to English visitors at the hotel to which he was permitted to attach himself. On returning home at the end of his service, Antonio had fallen ill, and had lain for some months at the Ospedale Maggiore, in Milan, one of the largest and most celebrated hospitals in Italy. After having, under his guidance, seen all the sights of Milan, including a visit one night to at least half a dozen shows and outside singing-saloons, to which Antonio claimed free entry, from having occasionally assisted in the orchestras of all of them, he proposed that I should go with him to the Ospedale Maggiore, where he assured me that for his sake I would be well received and would see much to interest me. Accordingly I assented, and after having passed through the great quadrangle, and by the various courts, and had gone over some of the wards of this magnificent institution, Antonio led me into a small chapel, dim and roofless, with unplastered walls, where stood upon an altar an image of the Virgin



and Child in black wood. "This is Loreto," he exclaimed, "the Holy House of our Lady." I could not understand what Antonio meant in his excitement. "See, here!" he added, "is one brick from the House—it is a veritable brick taken out of the walls of the "house," and with rapturous devotion, he kissed the stone and did obeisance to the poor wooden effigies. All this was to me at that time a riddle inexplicable. I can now, however, understand that a replica of the Shrine of Loreto can be seen at the Ospedale in Milan, and that it possesses at least one relic to attest its reality, and give sanction to its veneration. It is difficult nevertheless to understand how Milan came to be so highly favoured, for even the dust which collects within the "Holy House" is held sacred, and is preserved by the guardian priests of the sanctuary for distribution amongst the pilgrims, who, in countless numbers, throng the tiny enclosure, on their bended knees,—invoking blessings or imploring help.

Such is the "Holy House," the crown and glory of countless pilgrimages during many a bye-gone century, the dwelling, as is declared, of Joseph and Mary, where He who "became subject to "his parents" stooped to live and labour with his hands,—the Shrine before which, in ecstatic devotion, millions of our fellow men and women have prostrated themselves, and to the Treasury of which has been dedicated by Popes and cardinals, emperors and kings, princes and nobles, a wealth beyond computation.



But how comes this "Holy House" upon the top of a solitary mountain on the shores of the Adriatic? Tradition—accepted by one-half and scoffed at by the other half of Christendom—tells us that when in danger of desecration by the Saracens, the little home of the Holy Family was rescued by angelic beings, and borne aloft on their outspread wings to these peaceful shores. The incident, as I have mentioned, is realized for all time upon its sculptured walls in forms of poetic grace and beauty, and appealing as they do to the imagination, it has grown to be accepted for a verity as indisputable as scriptural truth itself. To the believer its walls are hallowed and its Shrine is sacred, since from it miraculous virtues flow for the healing of the nations; here prayers are answered and pardon given, and a blessing imparted even to material objects.

Lost in amazement at such credulity and infatuation—as I wandered past the confessionals for penitents of every race, adjoining the "Holy House"—I was accosted, in good English, by a young, intelligent-looking Father, whom I had previously observed in conversation with a group of German visitors. He was good enough to offer his services as ciceroné, which were gratefully accepted, and once more I made the tour of the church, listening to his "wond'rous tale," and gathering the meaning of the various symbols and objects of art or worship. As we returned to the "Holy House" he expressed a hope that I was interested in it.

"My interest," said I, "is certainly excited by what I see, but if you will excuse my want of faith, I am at a loss to understand how the 'Holy House' comes to be here, instead of at Nazareth."

"You are English," he replied, "and therefore we do not expect you to believe in its translation and sanctity, for of our own Church it is not a dogma. I am by no means surprised at your doubts, for when I came here from a small village in Germany, about three years ago, as Father Confessor to our German and English pilgrims, I was myself a disbeliever. But since then I have examined the whole history of the transportation of the Holy House, and the evidence of its authenticity was so overwhelming that I was forced to believe in it. When the Holy House arrived,"—as he put it—"holy and notable men made a pilgrimage to Nazareth and carefully measured the area on which the House of our Blessed Lady stood, and found it to correspond with scrupulous exactitude with the building before you. They marked, also, the similarity in quality of materials and form of construction, and they found an inscription engraved on a wall, which said 'The Holy House was here, and is gone!'"

Seeing that my companion was not indisposed to discuss the matter further with me I did not hesitate to reply, suppressing a smile as I did so, "Pardon me, if I say that the evidence you adduce does not satisfy me."



"No doubt, it will not," he answered; "you must begin by believing that it was effected by a miracle."

"Would not that be," said I, "to grant what I dispute?"

"Our Lord," I continued, "never wrought any miracle that was not for the good of mankind, and I fail to see in what way mankind can be benefitted by the transportation of the Holy House from Nazareth to this mountain."

"You cannot question the motive of any miracle wrought by the hand of the Almighty," he gravely responded. "But we are permitted to see its results. Know, that from the first,—long before this Church was erected to do honour to our Lady—wondrous miracles were wrought at the Shrine of the Virgin in this Holy House,—the lame walked, the sick were healed, and every kind of disease was cured. And such miracles as these continue to be wrought up to the present time. Even since I came here, one poor, paralyzed lady was borne daily on a couch to the Shrine, for prayer and supplication. For many weeks no visible results followed, but upon one memorable day, as she lay prostrate before the altar, her strength suddenly returned, and she arose and walked out of the Church wholly restored!"

"I have read and seen much of similar manifestations," I replied, in my own country, but we ascribe all such assumed cures to natural causes, explicable by science."



"Ah!" replied the Confessor, "that is because you have not the faith which we are told can even remove mountains."

"But, if all these blessings," said I, "are a direct gift from heaven to man, how few can share them, seeing that the population of your village is but six thousand, and that the Shrine is placed upon a mountain nearly a day's journey from the plains!"

"You forget," rejoined the Confessor, "or perhaps you do not know, that during our festal weeks the pilgrims often number more than sixty thousand, and that they come from all quarters of the globe."

"How can it be possible," I asked, "for sixty thousand persons to be accommodated in your small village?"

"Easily," replied the Confessor, "very easily, for they occupy every dwelling, they repose in the church, they sleep in the corridors, in the piazza, or they camp out on the mountains. And a wonderful sight it is, as well as a gratifying one. And even if the Holy Shrine be not what I believe it to be, is it not well that men should come here, confessing their sins, and finding pardon and reconciliation?"

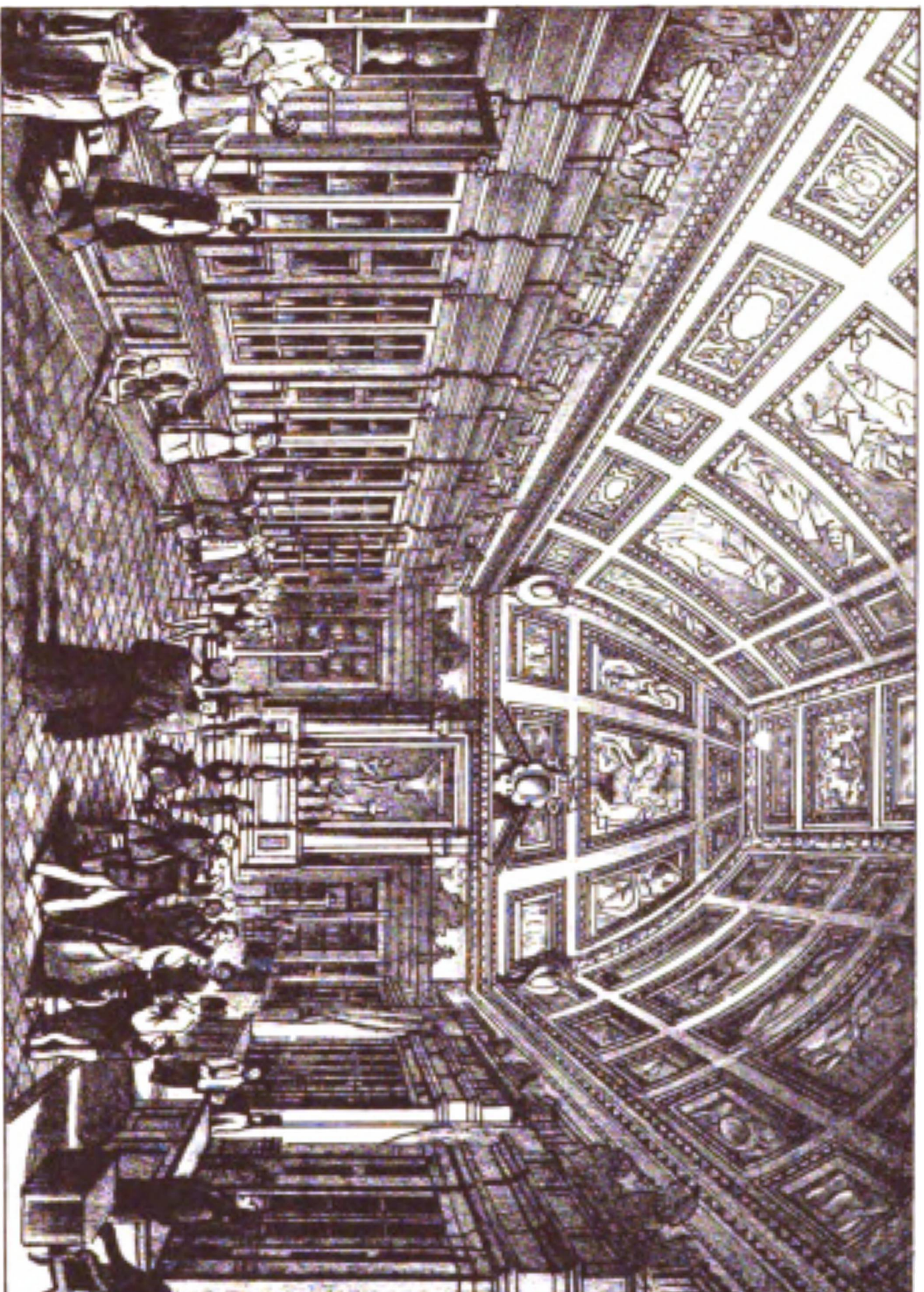


"Perhaps," said I, unwilling, for the Confessor's sake, to continue the controversy, "it is better for men to believe too much than to deny everything."

Thanking the Confessor for his courteous attention, and being about to take my leave, he desired me to remain, in order that he might conduct me to the Treasure House of the Shrine.

"This house," said my companion, upon entering, "has always been held to be a visible proof of the piety of the faithful, and their reverence for the sanctuary, for it contains offerings of all kinds, and of the utmost richness. The value is estimated at several millions of Roman crowns." I looked round and found myself in a noble, lofty hall, with vaulted ceiling, disposed in elegant compartments, and resplendent with frescoes of scriptural incidents. A large painting of the Crucifixion, raised upon an altar, occupied a commanding position at the further end; but that which awakened my utmost wonder was the succession of elegant architecturally-constructed glass cases ranged round the walls, the varied contents of which shone and sparkled under the influence of a powerful side light. Expressing my astonishment at such a sight, my conductor, who seemed delighted at my surprise, said to me, "You are pleased with what you behold; but know that the sad events of the last





· INTERIOR · OF · THE · TREASURY · HOUSE ·

century have caused much of our riches to disappear, partly from our having helped the State, and partly from the necessity of defending ourselves against the rapacity of another country. This magnificent Treasury House in which you stand was once pillaged to such an extent that the very glass was taken from the cases which contained our treasures ; and there was nothing remaining but the glories of our vaulted roof."

I could not but sympathise with my companion on the ruthless sacrilege of the French, although I had a mental reservation as to the wisdom of storing up such an assemblage of costly articles for no visible purpose beyond exciting surprise, or witnessing to the credulity and self-denial of the faithful. I therefore went the round of the shelves, and noted the amazing display of vessels of gold and silver, the crosses and chalices, the patens and censers, the statues in ivory and bronze, the enamels and jewels, the corals and bracelets—all of which were votive offerings from all Christendom. In one of the cases I observed an ornament of special value, from its being composed entirely of valuable rings, so arranged as to present the name JESUS. In another there is shown a chalice of silver-gilt, offered by Pius VII. on his return from exile ; in another a golden cup, enriched with brilliants and rubies, the gift of Joseph Napoleon, King of the Two Sicilies, in 1809 ; and a beautiful censer, contributed by Eugene Beauharnais when Vice-King of



Italy, in the same year. After completing our survey, the Confessor drew me to a case adjoining the entrance, and pointing to two small silver watches hanging in front, "There," said he, "are two gifts which I prize beyond all you see ; they express the gratitude of two poor Polish boys, who made their pilgrimage to our Shrine in weakly condition, and returned home in vigorous health, blessed be our Lady !"

I wondered, as he spoke, how much mountain air and exercise had done for these lads, but made no reply, and renewing my expression of thanks, I shook hands with the kindly Father Confessor, and bade him good-bye.





II.



CONFESS I was not sorry to leave the Church. The mental oppression brought about by doubting what seemed so real and authentic—the occasional wavering between the acceptance or rejection of what might be possible,—the sympathy and reverence awakened by the earnestness and devoutness of the numerous pilgrims,—the silent sanctity of the place,—the overwhelming evidence of universal trust and confidence,—the visible proofs of the self-sacrifice of past generations,—all tended to create such a confusion of sentiment and feeling, that I was glad to remove myself from the influence of impressions so contradictory and bewildering. If, I thought, in past ages, such men as Ignatius Loyala, St. Francois de Salles, St. Francois Xavier, and St. Carlo Borromeo, had lent their sanction to the Shrine by many personal pilgrimages, and if in these latter days Pius VII. had spent three days at this sanctuary, and Pius IX., accompanied by a retinue of



cardinals had paid a pilgrimage to the "Holy House,"—did it become me to question the reality of all I had seen at Loreto, the authenticity of its history, or the reality of its miracles? I recalled the words of Froude: "to sustain ourselves continuously," he says, "under the influence of reason, even when our faculties are preserved "in their natural balance, is a task too hard for most of us," and therefore some little time had to elapse ere the calm atmosphere of reflection enabled me to settle down into the conviction of John Stuart Mill's assertion, that "superstition and ceremony are the last things abandoned in a departing faith."

I strolled round the piazza in front of the Church, and was shown over the palace of the Archbishop. From an inscription on the front of the building I learnt that it was begun by Bremante in 1510, and continued by Sansovino and other celebrated architects up to 1750. It consists of two arcaded loges, the lower of which contains the apartments of the Canons, and the upper the residence of the Bishop and the administrators of the sanctuary. The rooms are numerous and spacious, but they are not elaborately decorated nor sumptuously furnished, as becomes the self-denying Order of St. Francis. In one, however, there is a series of tapestries, wrought in tissues of gold, from the cartoons of Raphael, amongst which I recognized several which are at South Kensington. As in some of the palaces throughout Italy, and in many of its monasteries, there

is here set apart a hall for the preparation and dispensing of medicine by the physician of the Order. Its interest consists in possessing more than one hundred vases, uniform in size and oval in shape, for the preservation of drugs. Their surfaces are entirely covered with graceful ornamentation, upon a bright chrome ground, wrought out in blue and sepia; from designs by Raphael, Julio Romano, Michael Angelo, and other great masters. Arranged in rows on shelves in glass cases, they challenge admiration from their number and great beauty. The subjects of the pictorial parts of the designs are chiefly taken from the Old Testament, and the facts of early Roman history. Others, again, represent the Metamorphoses of Ovid and the pastimes of children. Of these I learnt that they belonged in former times to the Duke of Urbino, and were presented to the sanctuary by Francois Marie. They have been held in such high estimation for their beauty and variety that it is affirmed by the great Bartoli, that "a Grand Duke of Florence, wishing to purchase some of them, was willing to give their weight in silver, and that Queen Christina of Sweden estimated them far above the treasures of the 'Holy House,' observing that 'precious stones and gold may be seen anywhere, but such a collection as this exists in no other place.'"

It struck me forcibly, whilst looking upon these vessels of homely usefulness, how luxurious must have been that age, and how



lavish its artistic indulgence, when, instead of the "green earthen pots" and the "beggarly account of empty boxes" in the shop of Romeo's apothecary, the genius of the greatest masters in Italy was made available in lending grace and beauty to objects usually so unattractive and so remote from observation.

The highest storey of the building is, I understand, occupied by the Apostolic Penitentiary, which supports a number of the Brothers of the Order, who, being of different nationalities, as well as possessing a knowledge of the varying dialects of Italy, are able to administer to the numerous pilgrims who seek the shrine. The opposite side of the piazza has never been completed according to Bramante's design; the buildings which form it are ordinary in character, but they contain the Piceno College, for both elementary and technical education, and a gymnasium for the benefit of the inhabitants of Loreto.

Before leaving Loreto I paid a visit to some of the little booths where the memorials of the Shrine are offered for sale, and made some purchases for gifts at home. I was fortunate, at one of these, to fall upon a book, in French, which had for its title, "Notes Historiques sur les Merveilleuses Translations de la Sainte Maison de Nazareth Vénérée a Loreto d'Ancône." Bearing so recent a date as 1880, I felt assured that it would prove both accurate and exhaustive, and might possibly contain all the facts

which had dissolved the doubts and confirmed the belief of my friend the Father Confessor. I therefore addressed myself to its pages, and resolving to make use of them, was staggered at the outset, to find on the back of the title, the following curt announcement: "Literary Property—All reproduction of these chapters is forbidden." As I am not aware of any international law of copyright affecting Italy and ourselves, and as I have no dread of clerical censure, I have availed myself of its facts, and now venture to trace the history of Loreto from its pages.

There is a degree of simplicity and frankness on the part of the writer of the book, which attests the sincerity of his convictions, and his courtesy is thoroughly of his own country. The preface is as follows:—"In view of publishing some of the details of the "miraculous translation of the 'Holy House' of Nazareth at Loreto, "as also a Guide to the great sanctuary, I have made use of a "manuscript compiled by a citizen of Loreto. This manuscript is "based upon the memorials left by Tursellino, Angelita, Martorelli, "and other writers who are historians of the 'Holy House' and of the "town of Loreto, and I hereby witness that the author has verified "on the spot the descriptions he gives of the temple and the various "monuments.—I present thee, oh! pious pilgrim, this little book, "in the hope that thou wilt make good use of it, that thou wilt read "and judge, and, finding it to thy mind, that thou wilt help as much



"as possible to spread it, to the end that the Queen of the
"Universe,—the Queen, who, by an unheard of prodigy, has
"deigned to accord her protection to the fortunate districts of our
"province of Piceno—may be greatly glorified.—Be happy !"

The Book opens with a history of Palestine from the earliest ages up to the time of Herod the Great, during the last year of whose reign our Saviour was born in Bethlehem. "Flying from the anger of Herod," says the writer, "the God-man lived almost seven years in Egypt, from whence he returned to Nazareth, the native place of the Holy Family, and where he lived for about twenty years in this house, which has been revered by the faithful from the earliest ages of Christianity, and which, in our days, is still an object of veneration at Loreto. God has never allowed either time or war to perpetrate any outrage upon the house of the Virgin. When, in the year 71 of the Christian era, Festus Vespasian sacked the town of Nazareth, this sacred spot escaped pillage, by a dispensation from above; the soldiers could not penetrate the little street where the House was situated, nor were they able to touch its walls, which God preserved to become one day a monument of his Almighty power, and the object of the veneration of the whole Christian world."

After this there follows a detailed history of the translation of the "Holy House" from Nazareth to Dalmatia, on the side of the



Adriatic Sea opposite to that upon which it now stands, and it is as well to mention at once that the building has undergone frequent removals, without (judging from its present appearance) having materially suffered in its various migrations.

With a fulness of detail and exactitude of date not always accompanying legend or tradition, the historian proceeds to state that "On the 10th of May 1291, between midnight and the dawn of "the Sunday—the sky being cloudless and the sea calm and limpid—"the villagers of Tarsatto, on the Dalmatian side of the Adriatic, "perceived upon the neighbouring hill, until that time uninhabited, "a strange house visible to all. They rushed towards it in "astonishment, and how great was their surprise to find an edifice "of four walls, in the form of a church, with a belfry and two bells "on the roof, standing without the support of foundation or "pavement! Inside the house they discovered an altar, surmounted "by a crucifix painted upon canvas, and also a statue in cedar "wood of the Blessed Virgin, holding in her arms the infant Jesus, "the hair and vestments of both being worn after the Nazarine "manner. The secret of the house was subsequently disclosed to "Alexander, the village Padre, as he lay on a bed of suffering during "a dangerous illness. The Virgin appeared to him in a vision, and "revealed to him that the strange house was that in which she was "born and had lived, where she was saluted by the angel and

"conceived the Word, where she nourished and brought up the Holy Child ; and as a proof of the revelation, she restored him to health, "enjoining him to make known the miracle to the inhabitants "of Tarsatto."

The book then proceeds with a circumstantial narrative of the visit paid to Nazareth, which the young Father Confessor mentioned in our conversation in the church, "and from that time," continues the historian, "no one has dared to cast a doubt upon the "authenticity of the miracle." But amongst the faithful many must have dared to doubt, as for example my young clerical ciceroné, who enforced his convictions by such a declaration, and all who are without the pale of his church are manifestly ignored by the historian.

It would seem that, after a period of three years and seven months, the house was again borne by angels across the Adriatic Sea, and "deposited in a wood of laurels not far from the hill upon "which it now stands." Strange it is that the history, circumstantial in other details, is silent as to the cause of this sudden and unexpected removal, yet the record is that it took place "between "the 9th and 10th of December 1294, when the shepherds as they "were watching their flocks, as formerly those of Bethlehem, "suddenly saw a brilliant light, which attracted their attention to "the wood of laurels. A sight so unusual greatly alarmed them,

“as they knew there was no habitation in the wood, but other
“shepherds joined them, marvelling at the sight of the Holy House,
“and declaring that they had seen it in a vision, crossing the clouds
“in the hands of angels.”

The narrative thus continues :—“Re-assuring themselves, they
“entered the house, and after examining everything it contained,
“they became convinced that there was something about it super-
“human and divine, in which belief they spent the night there in
“prayer.” Their simplicity appears at first to have persuaded only
a few to place faith in their story, but at last the persistence of their
assertions carried conviction to a large number of people, who allowed
themselves to be conducted by the shepherds to the sacred wood.
“Here, at the sight of the holy edifice, all were filled with
“astonishment. The sudden apparition of a house of such antique
“construction, of a form so singular, built of stones unknown in the
“neighbourhood, and standing solidly, without support, on unequal
“ground, was to all of them strange and overwhelming, and the new-
“comers, in emotions of joy and fear, melted into tears, sighing,
“and exclaiming that the hand of God was evident in this
“singular event.”

After this, the history wanders into a long narrative of certain
unseemly quarrels between two brothers, the owners of the wood of
laurels to which the house had been transported, and which led to



its final removal, by the same heavenly visitants as before, to the spot upon which it stands at the present day. It is evident that by the gradual acceptance of so legendary and fragmentary a history, the Shrine of Loreto in time became recognised by the faithful as a place of pilgrimage; and I have little doubt but that my friend, the young Father Confessor, had no other foundation for his newly-acquired faith in its reality and sanctity than the narrative here presented.

I find that it was not until the pontificate of Boniface VIII. that the church manifested her belief in the miracle, by considering in what manner to preserve and honour the sacred edifice, and the inhabitants, seeing that the house, from the frail nature of its materials as well as from its great age, would inevitably fall into decay, determined to build around it a wall of fortification. But alas! according to the chronicle, "the old walls of the august house refused to join themselves to new walls, and the design of the workmen was found to have been miraculously defaced; the wall of circumvallation was separated and removed to a distance from the sacred spot." This unlooked for intervention, however, was held to be an authoritative disapproval of any other protection than that which should accord with the sacred character of the house, and therefore the inhabitants began to erect numerous sheds to shelter the multitudes who were attracted to the Shrine, as well as

dwelling for the priests who came to minister. "Outside, and as close as possible to the house," says the historian, "an altar was built, in order that the pilgrims who were not permitted to enter the house, might have the privilege of hearing mass. The most celebrated painters of the age decorated these erections with representations of the different incidents in the life of the Virgin, as well as of the various translations of the 'Holy House,' and these dwellings formed the nucleus of the present village of Loreto."

The civil wars of the Guelphs and Ghibellines, which desolated Italy during the 14th century, are recorded by the historian to have suspended for a time, the numerous pilgrimages to the Shrine, and also to have been the cause of the destruction, by fire, of the little village. But when order was re-established, the inhabitants thought less of restoring the town than of renewing, with glory and honour, the services of the "Holy House." Accordingly they undertook new works, and throwing down the remains of their primitive buildings, they surrounded the house of the Virgin with a moderately sized church, built new houses for the reception of pilgrims, and new erections of all kinds for the services of the temple.

The construction of this church occupied nearly one hundred and forty years, up to the time of the pontificate of Paul II., who commissioned the Florentine architect Italien-de-Majano to prepare



plans of the second temple, much more magnificent than the first, less Gothic in style, and which is the existing edifice.

At this juncture in the history of Loreto, the author breaks out into the following impassioned and devotional rhapsody :—"In this sanctuary, how many Jews, schismatics, and heretics have perceived the ray divine, which has dissipated the darkness of their errors,—how many of the possessed delivered,—how many of the diseased restored,—how many sinners converted? Italy, under misfortunes without number, which have constantly swept over her, has always found solace and support when she turned her looks towards this august monument. By the 'Holy House,' earthquakes have subsided, epidemics have ceased, war has been suppressed, dissension has vanished! Mary of Loreto ever hears the prayers of Christian people, and by her favours, this happy district has seen all danger and all disaster disappear."

Thus ends the record of the "Holy House" up to modern times.

I find from the History that, as late as the beginning of the present century, Pius VII. had visited Loreto, and there celebrated the mass. "It saddened him," says the writer, "to see the 'Holy House' deprived of its statue of the Virgin and Child, which had been removed by the French on their invasion of Italy, but in 1802



"His Holiness had the consolation of bringing it back from Paris." In 1814, on his return from exile, the Pope spent three days at Loreto, celebrating mass each day in the "Holy House," and leaving in the treasury the chalice which he had used for that purpose.

It is further recorded that Pius IX. was scarcely seated in the chair of St. Peter, in 1846, than he demonstrated his regard for the "Holy House" by sending to the Virgin of Loreto "in token of his ardent love" his episcopal cross emblazoned with jewels, as well as two magnificent rings, expressing the wish that they should adorn the statue of Mary. And we read, finally, that on the 14th of May 1847, His Holiness went in person, accompanied by several Cardinals, to the Shrine of Loreto, "leaving there many rich tokens of his devotion to the place."

Upon a review of the whole narrative, whilst one may lament, although forced to respect, the simplicity of a faith which rests upon testimony so vague, it is only charitable to believe that the whole story may have originated in the motive of presenting to the eye of sense a material evidence of divine favour and interposition, so as to awaken and sustain religious fervour and devotion. The tendency of the human mind to favour whatever is wonderful and mysterious may help to explain the subjection of the reasoning faculties by those who in its earliest history lent their



sanction to the miraculous translation of the "Holy House." For in that age to doubt was to deny, to reflect was to reject, and whatever the Church accepted carried with it the power and influence almost of divine authority. The visible proofs of miraculous intervention accumulated, and if holy and learned men made pilgrimages to the Shrine and served at its altar, it became the duty of an unlettered laity to rest in its sanctity and to believe in its power.

After such an accumulation of testimony to the sacred character of Loreto, it may seem ungenerous to despise those who have dedicated such tokens of their veneration to the Shrine, or to condemn the never-ending bands of pilgrims, of every nationality, who crowd its courts. Yet one must not forget that true faith is the evidence of "things unseen," and that it is the heart, and not the imagination of mankind, that must be influenced by the power of divine truth.

The history of religious enthusiasm presents innumerable instances of a blind faith in supernatural agency prevailing, not only amongst the ignorant and uneducated, but amid the ranks of men whose position in the church, the state, or society might be considered a safeguard against the possibility of delusion or deception. The history of the Maid of Kent, in the reign of Henry VIII., affords a strange instance of the insatiable faculty



of human credulity, and in later times that of Joanna Southcott attests how easily the world may be duped. When, however, in our own days, Lourdes, Knock, and Paray-le-Monial are sought in the hope of miraculous interposition, it is not surprising that the claims of Loreto, as a place of pilgrimage—resting, as they do, upon a history so remote, and upon an authority so regarded—should continue to influence the mind and heart of the Roman Catholic Church. And if we ask ourselves what issues would follow if Loreto, with all its blandishments of Art, its Romance of history, and its accredited virtues, were swept away, might there not be room to fear that cold Infidelity would enter in, and that the last state would be worse than the first?

Nevertheless, the evidences of squalid poverty and listless idleness which present themselves around Loreto do not speak much for its moral or social influence upon the people, and I felt strongly, as I returned, that if even a small portion of the wealth of its Shrine were devoted to the improvement of dwellings and the encouragement of industry, it might not be an unworthy appropriation of its vast treasures.

“When once,” says Canon Liddon, in one of his Bampton Lectures, “pious affection, or devout imagination, have seized the reins of religious thought, it is easy for individuals or schools to



“wander far from the beaten paths of a clear yet sober faith into
“some theological wonderland, the airiest creation of the liveliest
“fancy, where, to the confusion and unsettlement of souls, the wildest
“fiction and the highest truth may be inextricably intertwined in an
“entanglement of hopeless and bewildering disorder.”

Recalling these sentiments—singularly confirming what I had
seen and felt at Loreto—I returned to Ancona, passed a night of
dreamy restlessness, and next morning got on board the early
steamer for Venice.



